

Merritt Parkway, Bayberry Lane Bridge
Spanning Bayberry Lane at the 23.2 mile mark
on the Merritt Parkway
Westport
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-104

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Merritt Parkway, Bayberry Lane Bridge

HAER No. CT-104

Location: Spanning Bayberry Lane at the 23.2 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Westport, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.639960.4558920
Quad: Westport, Connecticut

Construction Date: 1939

Engineer: Connecticut Highway Department

Architect: George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.

Contractor: Peter Mitchell Construction Company
Greenwich, Connecticut

Present Owner: Connecticut Department of Transportation
Wethersfield, Connecticut

Present Use: Used by traffic on Bayberry Lane to cross the Merritt Parkway

Significance: The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

Historians: Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

LOCAL HISTORY

In 1648, five settlers migrated west from the town of Fairfield and established homesteads along the Saugatuck River. Residents of Fairfield referred to this region as Green's Farms, because of John Green who settled there. The church referred to this region as the West Parish of Fairfield.¹

For the next century this rural community grew slowly. By the late 1700s the town was known as Saugatuck. In 1806, schooners started making weekly runs between Saugatuck and New York City. The town developed into a shipping center, with two shipyards. This was due in large part to the Saugatuck River which was navigable farther inland than any other stream in Fairfield County.²

In 1824, the parish of Saugatuck presented a petition of civic independence to Fairfield's town leaders. In 1835, the Connecticut legislature created the town of Westport from parts of Fairfield, Norwalk, and Weston.³

The arrival of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad in 1849, further bolstered the economy. "The building of the railroad ushered in a new era. The wharves along the Saugatuck disappeared as did the vessels that had for many years docked beside them. When the new railroad station for Westport was built, several factories opened in the vicinity."⁴ Westport remains a manufacturing center to the present day.

The completion of the Merritt Parkway enabled Westport to also become a bedroom community for New York City. Residents actively encouraged construction of the parkway in their town, especially

¹Julie Haggeman, "Founding of West Parish of Fairfield." (Manuscript, Westport Public Library Vertical File), 1.

²Robert Adams, "Saugatuck History," (Manuscript, Westport Public Library Vertical File, 1968).

³Haggeman, 3.

⁴"Westport, Connecticut, a preliminary directive plan," prepared by the Section of City Planning, Department of Architecture, School of the Fine Arts, Yale University, 1947.

when it appeared that the Merritt might follow a more northerly route through the communities of Wilton and Weston. Conflict did arise as the roadway was being constructed. Local business leaders were concerned that there would not be enough exits to give motorists access to Westport's commercial district. These fears were alleviated when the second section of the parkway to open, ended at Weston Road/Route 57, depositing all traffic onto Main Street. Civic leaders were then distressed by the congestion this generated in the business district. The problem was solved when the next link of the parkway opened to the Huntington Turnpike.⁵

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Bayberry Lane starts at Long Lots Road and proceeds north through Prospect Hill to Easton Road. The Peter Mitchell Construction Company of Greenwich, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from North Avenue, in Westport, to Congress Street, in Fairfield (ConnDot project #180-56). The grade separation and bridge contract for the Bayberry Lane Bridge also went to the Peter Mitchell Construction Company.⁶ The bridge cost \$26,630 and was completed in 1939. The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from Easton Road/Route 136, in Westport, to Congress Street, in Fairfield. This contract was awarded to the A. I. Savin Company of East Hartford, CT

⁵"Westport Wants Entrance at Cross Highway, But Fairfield Opposed," Westporter-Herald, 18 November 1938, p. 1.

"The Newest Plan is For Traffic Leaving Parkway to Use Wilton Road; Those Entering Go Thru Narrow Main Street," Westporter-Herald, 9 December 1938, p. 1.

"Chamber of Commerce to Petition for Routing of Parkway Traffic Via Compo Road," Westporter-Herald, 10 January 1939, p. 1.

"Westport Chamber of Commerce Wants Traffic From Merritt Diverted Somewhere Besides Main Street," Westporter-Herald, 13 January 1939, p. 1.

"Cox Promises to Examine Ramp Issue." Westporter-Herald, 24 January 1939, p. 1.

⁶Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

(ConnDot project# 180-135). The Bayberry Lane Bridge has received little maintenance since it was built. Recently it had some spalling concrete was removed and patched.⁷

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Bayberry Lane Bridge is a single-span, reinforced- concrete, barrel-type rigid-frame bridge. The frame spans 33'-3-1/8" at a skew of 7°-9'-45" over the road. The Merritt Parkway travels over the bridge on a 60' wide clear roadway. Parallel wing walls form the approach for the overpass.

The rigid-frame design for this bridge differs from most of the other bridges on the Merritt Parkway because it is shaped like a segmental arch, instead of an arched beam, supported on walls. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed description of the rigid-frame.) The intrados of the span rises 8'-9" from the springline to the crown. The extrados curves to double the frame thickness from 12" at the crown to 24" at the leg.

The Bayberry Lane Bridge is decorated with classic architectural details similar to the Perry Avenue Bridge in Norwalk (see HAER No. CT-90). The pylons are pilasters with defined bases and capitals. The molding defining the capitals on the pilasters is continued across the wing walls. The railing has large posts to continue the pilaster above the curb, and intermediate posts approximately 8'-6" on center. The balustrade is composed of closely spaced square blocks. A precast cartouche of the Connecticut coat of arms is located on the inside of the northeast pylon post.

⁷Bayberry Lane Bridge, DOT #733; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

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Westporter-Herald. 1938-1939.

-----, "Westport, Connecticut, a preliminary directive plan." Prepared by the Section of City Planning, Department of Architecture, School of the Fine Arts, Yale University, 1947.

-----, Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

-----, Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), bistorians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.